

Teacher Education in Italy, Germany, England, Sweden and Finland

GIORGIO OSTINELLI

Being a Teacher Today

Being a teacher today in Europe does not mean the same as 20 or 30 years ago. The developed countries are gradually changing their status from modern-industrial systems – whose cultural models were widely influenced by positivist views of reality – to post-modern societies (Hargreaves, 2003). However, the change of reference at the cultural – and therefore school – level is slower than in other domains (Ostinelli, 2007). On the one hand, the limitations of traditional forms of instruction – such as the systematic practice of face to face lessons or written examinations as the sole instruments of assessment – are well-known; on the other, school programmes conceived as a collection of notions are clearly devoid of meaning in a society where access to information is becoming easier every day. But the perpetuation of these practices in schools (and the emergence of movements like *Back to basics*) testifies to the difficulties that various school systems are facing in leading and not only suffering the change. In this context, teacher education can play a very important role, taking into account some important issues:

- The need of a deep understanding of and reflection on concepts such as knowledge and learning in a complex and changing world (Hargreaves, 2003; Schön, 1983).
- An up-to-date vision of the professional role of the teacher in contemporary societies, taking into account the fundamental function played by the building of shared educational values in the school domain (Sergiovanni, 1999).
- The issue of the ‘polarisation’ of the teaching profession: nowadays it combines aspects that are characteristic of the activity of a professional (discretion, specific competences, etc.) and traits that are typical of a functionary’s job (curriculum decided from above, control over the teaching by the principals and/or the inspectors, etc.). At present, we are witnessing an evolution, depending on the national educational policy, towards one or other of the two ‘poles’ (Ostinelli, 2007).
- The ability of the European school systems to face the challenges posed by the increasing presence of children without a basic mastery of the country of adoption’s spoken and written language (Norberg, 2000; Clarke & Drudy, 2006).
- The need for the teachers of every grade to hold pedagogical, psychological and relational competences in order to interact effectively with their students at the individual and group level.

- The aptitude to operate in collaborative environments, where cooperation between colleagues and other stakeholders is a common feature (Joyce & Showers, 1988; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).
- The possession of basic research competences (Erixon, Frånberg & Kallós, 2001) through updating (reading of articles published in scientific journals, participation in congresses and formative opportunities, etc.), and participation in ‘on the spot’ research in the school.
- The ability to use Information and Communication Technologies in a technically adequate and culturally attentive manner (Bigum & Kenway, 1998).

Traditionally, teacher education was split into two phases: ‘pre-service’ and ‘in-service’ education. Great importance has always been attributed to the former, according to the view which holds that the theoretical aspects of a profession are learnt once and for all through intensive instruction. This idea is misleading and it would be sufficient to take into consideration in the medical context, for example, the changes in health therapies which took place in the 90s, stemming from the results obtained from research. The more scientific research develops, the more practical experiences in that field are destined to evolve. Contemporary teacher education should therefore combine theory and practice in a continuous process which includes lifelong pre-service and in-service education, a well-established trend in Northern Europe (Antikainen, 2005). The concept of *lifelong learning* is fundamental and entails a more important role for the building of in-service learning paths by and for teachers.

In this article, we shall begin by analysing today’s pre-service teacher education in five European areas:

- the Mediterranean area – Italy
- the Central European area – Germany
- the British area – England
- the Nordic area – Sweden and Finland

Two models of initial teacher education have been developed worldwide: the *simultaneous* and the *consecutive*. The report *The teaching profession in Europe: profile, trends and concerns. Initial training and transition to working life* (Eurydice, 2002) defined them thus:

Consecutive model

At the outset, students receive general education in order to obtain a degree in a particular subject or branch of study. At or near the end of this period of study, they enroll in a programme of initial professional training, enabling them to qualify as teachers, which may still contain some general education courses.

Concurrent model

It involves a programme which, from the outset, combines general education in one or more subjects with theoretical and practical professional teacher training.

In Europe, the panorama is varied: in some countries, only one model exists, in others, both coexist. Each presents advantages and disadvantages, but, in certain conditions, such as an effective interdisciplinary curriculum – where the educational and disciplinary subjects are effectively integrated – and a good coordination between academic education and practical apprenticeship, the simultaneous model appears to carry some advantages, as will be seen later.

Teacher Education in Italy

In Italy, primary school and kindergarten teachers were trained in training colleges for schoolteachers, whilst teachers of intermediate and secondary education generally held specific qualifications in the subject taught (Todeschini, 2003). As from the 1970s, this gradually changed, but the process was fairly slow and did not face effectively the problems on the ground (Luzzatto, 2006): as often happens, the cart was put before the horse and the suggestions of Law 477 of 1973, which proclaimed the principle of teacher education at university level, did not find a concrete application until the 1990s (Imperato, 2003) when two curricula were proposed:

At primary school and kindergarten level: four-year academic courses (Corso di laurea in scienze della formazione primaria – CLSFP)

For secondary school teachers: a post-degree two-year master (Scuola di specializzazione all'insegnamento secondario – SSIS).

Therefore, teacher education for the primary school kept its simultaneous character, whilst a consecutive model was envisaged for secondary education. The implementation of the project lasted for almost 10 years, until 1998 for the CLSFP and 1999 for the SSIS. Meanwhile, with the growing autonomy granted to universities, teacher education assumed a rather abstract character. The objectives for all teachers are the following:

- Disciplinary competences
- Awareness of pupils' educational and psycho-social needs
- Cooperation with colleagues, families, institutions, etc.
- Ability to found the teaching of disciplinary subjects on strong educational bases, with an open attitude
- Updating competences and knowledge
- Flexibility in the development of educationally motivating projects
- Encouragement of the active participation of pupils in school activities
- Adequate use of methodologies and resources
- Promotion of open communication with and amongst pupils through the creation of an open and a 'secure' environment
- Openness and innovation
- Rigorous use of assessment instruments
- An 'extended' on-going professionalism¹

But one needs only to go around Italian schools and universities to realise that, despite some improvements, such objectives are still far from being reached. The training of Italian teachers was based on four areas (Luzzatto, 2006):

- Teaching fundamentals
- Disciplinary didactics
- Workshops
- Apprenticeship

Teaching fundamentals is based on various pedagogical theories; *disciplinary didactics* deal with the development of skills for an effective teaching of the disciplines; the main scope of *teaching workshops* is the development of ‘interdisciplinarity’ as a link between learning and practice, whilst *apprenticeship* is a kind of practical training in schools. In substance, universities enjoy considerable freedom in the organisation of the first three activities, whilst the fourth, which is still under their supervision, takes place outside of them. Table I summarises the organisation of CLSFP studies at the University of Bologna for the academic year 2007/2008.

TABLE I. The organisation of CLSFP’s studies at the University of Bologna

1st Two-year period		
	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Credits</i>
Education	180	18
Psychology	60	6
Social sciences	120	12
General teaching methods	30	3
Disciplinary subjects and disciplinary didactics	450	45
2nd Two-year period		
	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Credits</i>
Education	90	9
Psychology	60	6
Social and environmental sciences	60	6
Disciplinary subjects and disciplinary didactics	300	39
Optional courses	120	12
Choice courses	120	12
Activities spread over the four-year period		
Apprenticeship	480	48
Workshops	240	24
Total	2400	240

The reform of the university curricula took off in European countries (the Bologna Process) in June 1999, leading to a structure founded on the 3+2 pattern. Italy took part in this process and some changes in teacher education were planned as from 2003: for the primary school, a 5-year curriculum and for the secondary school, a three-year ‘disciplinary’ bachelor followed by two ‘professionalising’ years.

One could perceive such a transition as something logical and ‘natural’, but things must not be judged as such. If for kindergarten and primary school teacher education, passing from the former four-year curriculum to a five-year degree can be considered an improvement, for secondary school, things are not so straightforward. Here, the fear about the loss of teacher’s disciplinary competences concerns the request to scale down the educational part of the curriculum. In fact, with time, the requirements to teach in secondary schools went from the

possession of a four-five-year degree to the 4/5+2 (four/five years to obtain a degree and two years of SSIS) pattern to arrive at the 5+2 (five years of master and two years of SSIS) contemporary version: with those precedents, a passage to a model of 3+2 leading to a master in education can neither be simple nor painless, and the two professionalising years – considering that the disciplinary character of the 3-year bachelor is taken for granted – very soon became a bone of contention.

A profound conviction remains in Italian schools whereby relational, educational, psychological competences, etc. are important for teaching small children, but much less so for teaching secondary school pupils, where a good knowledge of the subjects to be taught would be more than sufficient. The fears of ‘pan-pedagogy’ and ‘didacticism’ and the references to ‘pseudo-sciences that indicate the manner with which one should do something without necessarily knowing what it is’ (Peccenini, 2003) say a great deal about how the objective of improving the teacher’s professionalism is perceived. Hence, two groups emerged (Peccenini, 2003; Luzzatto, 2006): on the one hand, the *disciplinarians* and on the other the *transversalists*. For the latter, teachers should integrate the disciplinary competences with good educational knowledge and skills in an interdisciplinary synthesis by means of workshop activities and apprenticeship. In brief, the first group expresses a clearly conservative view, whilst the second is in greater agreement with the tendencies expressed in many other innovative European countries, as we will see later.

Nevertheless, the 3+2 teacher education model still follows in the footsteps of Law 477 of 1973, remaining much more a wish expressed on paper than a fact. In the meantime, the SSIS courses continue, but their degrees do not constitute the unique condition to teach in secondary schools, since there are innumerable deviations and exceptions, different forms of graduation, ‘alternative’ courses, etc. (Luzzatto, 2006a), as in the best tradition. One of the greatest flaws of the Italian teacher education system is the lack of cohesion between the curricular programming and access to the job: the perspective is that of a perennial limbo, in which short-term contracted teachers will be added to the pre-existing ones (ADI, 2005). There is still a wide gap between teacher education and teaching, in particular concerning the workshops in universities and the apprenticeships in schools: in most cases, people work in watertight compartments. In conclusion, there have been some improvements (if one thinks of the activities of the CLSFP and SSIS) in pre-service teacher education in Italy, but much remains to be done.

Teacher Education in Germany

In Germany, each *Land* is responsible for the training of its teachers and the central State provides only the general rules as a sort of national *framework* (Peisert & Framheim, 1994). The differences between the various *Länder* are sometimes substantial, so that, in a limited number of cases, the academic titles issued by some are not considered valid in others (Viebahn, 2003).

The training of all teachers in Germany is simultaneous. After obtaining the school-leaving certificate (*Abitur*), teachers for every grade of school enrol in the university where they can choose respectively between two (secondary school) or three disciplines (primary school) in addition to the courses in education (didactics, pedagogy, psychology, sociology of education, etc.) for a period lasting from seven (primary school) to nine semesters (secondary school) during which two to

three years' experience of apprenticeship are envisaged (Terhart, 1995). At the end of the curriculum, candidates sit for the first state examination (*Erste Staatsexamen*), which gives access to the next phase in the workshops for teacher education (*Studienseminar*) outside the university, where future teachers are paid. During this phase, candidates are taught by experienced teachers, whilst, in the schools, they are followed by expert teachers (*Mentoren*). They are part of the teaching body of the school, where they can teach in an autonomous way.

The problems originating from the splitting of teacher education into a first 'academic' phase and a second 'practical' one led the *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz* to suggest the practice of exchanges between the personnel of the two cycles, in which everyone could participate and better know the daily activity of their colleagues of the other cycle (Viebahn, 2003).

A second state examination (*Zweite Staatsexamen*) on candidates' ability to reflect on their professional practice (Terhart, 2003) is envisaged at the end of the 'workshop' phase described above. This phase could last between 18 and 24 months. If successful, candidates can apply for a teaching post: their results will be classified and this classification will be used by educational districts and schools to allocate workplaces.

After three years of professional practice, teachers are evaluated and appointed if considered adequate: if they have no career ambitions, further evaluations are not envisaged (Terhart, 2000). This is, in short, the structure of the German system of teacher education. In the past, secondary school teachers only needed a disciplinary degree, whilst for primary school, as in many other European countries, teachers were educated in teachers' colleges. As from 1970, the curricula for the primary school were transferred to the university level, whilst notions of didactics and pedagogy were integrated in the training of secondary school teachers.

The linear and up-to-date development of teacher training in Germany is not exempt from problems. The most manifest is the gap between education in the universities and the professionalising workshops. In fact, the system lacks an organically structured relationship between its various elements, despite the initiatives undertaken, such as the creation of 'Centers for teacher education' (Viebahn, 2003). In particular (von Carlsburg, 2006), in the first phase, there is a lack of links between the practical training, the studies of education and the disciplinary ones; the status of the educational studies is too often subordinate; the apprenticeships are not always well linked with the theoretical notions; and the first state examination is a test of short-time memory. In the second phase, there is no coordination with the first; it is very difficult to be both consultant and judge; the importance of the degree leads to forms of competition and rivalry amongst candidates; there is a dependency on the seminar instructors; it is not easy to find instructors who are competent and qualified; and the coordination of activities between the workshop and the schools can be problematic. In the third phase, not enough importance is given to the further development of the teachers; there is no connection between professional performance and the teacher's career; and there is no systematic support for continuous learning and the development of professionalism.

Other problems are stressed by Terhart (Terhart, 2000): the advanced age at which the teachers are appointed (from 26 to 30 years, if not above); the gap between the pre-service education and the effective teaching activity; the ambitious and costly character of the first phase in terms of time and economic resources,

compared with the meager means provided for the third phase; the rigidity of the system (it is very difficult for teachers to change the order of school in which they teach: primary school teachers can become secondary teachers with great difficulty, and vice-versa); and there is the question of unemployment, inasmuch as access to teacher education is not linked to the number of vacancies. This concerns more particularly primary school teachers, who can 'recycle' themselves for other activities only with great difficulty.

The German organisation of the teacher education system and educational quality has been for many years in the vanguard in Europe (i.e. primary school teacher education was placed at university level as from 1970s and this is a reality everywhere today, except in Baden-Württemberg). However, this system is now confronted with the challenges posed by a rapidly changing post-modern society, where the idea that a person receives an education 'once and for all' is obsolete. Therefore, the great importance attributed to pre-service education, to the detriment of in-service qualification, is a factor that weighs down the structure. Moreover, the question of the Bologna Process affects the German system too, and this is no small problem, since it entails a forced rethinking of its whole organisation (Terhart, 2000). Some scholars stress the key-competences the German contemporary teacher should possess (Arning, 2000, cited in Viebahn, 2003):

- *Self-responsibility competence*, based on self-perception and reflection upon one's own thoughts and actions, aims and abilities.
- *General educational action competence*, consisting of broad educational and relational competences.
- *Particular educational action competence*, consisting in teaching competences and skills to mould the educational environment
- *Subject competence*, including not only technical knowledge but also insight into the possibilities and limitations of the discipline taught
- *Organisational competence*, i.e. the ability to act in an appropriate, self-determined and creative way inside the school context.

As Messner (2004) underlines, one of the main purposes of teacher education should be the training of authentic reflective professionals; however, in Germany, this vision has to settle scores with a minimalist approach, according to which it is important to reduce the costs of the system, even if that could imply the decadence of the quality of teaching (Terhart, 2003).

Teacher Education in England

Teacher education in England shows differences with the systems of continental Europe. These tend to pass from a kind of 'Napoleonic', top-down set-up (Ostinelli, 2007) to more decentralised situations, where schools and teachers tend, at least on paper, to become more autonomous. In England, a different and substantially opposite process took place in the last 20 years (Vulliamy *et al.*, 1997). The English school went from very great educational autonomy to strict control from the centre (Sayer, 2006), whilst acquiring more autonomy in the management of economic resources (Halstead, 2003).

One could think that English schools are passing from a state of educational autonomy to an administrative/managerial one; but looking more carefully, the

situation shows a process of centralisation of power at the political level — by means of a greater control on the curriculum and lecturing — accompanied by a more rational distribution of administrative tasks. In brief, the basic idea is the development of a kind of marketplace of education, but within precise and definite limits (Whitty *et al.*, 1997): the aim is to set the standards for the educational offer of the school system and do whatever is possible to induce the single schools to reach them, using devices ranging from concurrence between schools to the strong exercise of inspection.

Up until 30 years ago, the main object of education in England was self-fulfilment, personal growth, diversity and freedom for teachers and pupils (Halstead, 2003); there was no national curriculum, and the teachers enjoyed great autonomy compared to their continental colleagues. Teacher education took place in the universities, the polytechnics or the Colleges of Education, also with rather free criteria. From the 1970s, this was amply questioned, and in 1988 — a crucial year for the fate of the English school system — the National Curriculum was promulgated. It should be noted that, after 1968, the level of cultural conformity of the teaching body, one of the ‘strong’ foundations of the preceding organisation, faded away (Ostinelli, 2007).

Parallel to this, while the other academic courses maintained their traditional independence, a common curriculum for teachers’ education was created in 1984 by the Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE), establishing which contents should be taught and substantially reducing the weight of ‘educational’ subjects (pedagogy, psychology, sociology, etc.). The CATE was abolished in 1994 and replaced by the TTA (Teacher Training Agency), whose explicit objective was the transition from teacher education to teacher training (Moon, 2003). Following this, teacher education became more practical and disciplinary and less education-centred (Stephens, Tønnessen & Kyriacou, 2004).

These changes are not fortuitous and reflect a very precise educational policy, first planned and carried out by the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and then substantially maintained and adapted by the government of Tony Blair, according to whom the school of the 1970s and 1980s was incapable of reaching determined standards, promoting the discipline and giving students the skills and competences required by the marketplace (Barton, *et al.*, 1994). As Tony Blair affirmed:

I have always said that education is this government’s top priority. The teaching profession is critical to our mission . . . this Green Paper sets out the governments’ proposals for improving the teaching profession . . . [It represents] the most fundamental reform of the teaching profession since state education began. (Tony Blair, cited by Furlong, 2005).

The Labour government dropped the single national curriculum of 1988 in favour of a centralised control on the quality of teaching (Furlong, 2005), changing the focus from the process to the outcome. It increased the number of ways to access the teaching profession. Nevertheless, even in this case, the decentralisation was ‘channeled’ through the definition of precise standards, in particular concerning the QTS (Qualified Teacher Status, a kind of certification of the quality of the skills of the teacher). It is rather difficult to describe the various contemporary ways of becoming a teacher in England, where:

The consecutive model is the most common route for secondary education teachers (. . .) Since the late 1980s/early 1990s, a number of alternative routes to qualified teacher status have been available in England including part-time and employment-based training (Eurydice, 2002, p. 13).

This quite radical change had the following objectives (Halstead, 2003; Furlong, 2005):

- To prescribe and verify the teaching and the learning of basic knowledge
- To reduce the influence of the universities on the education of teachers through other curricula to access the job
- To have a suitable body of teachers to carry out efficiently the envisaged tasks.

These are the ways of becoming a teacher in England (TDA, 2007):

Undergraduate teacher training

The Bachelor of Education (BEd)

The BEd is an academic curriculum that leads to the QTS. It can last between three and four years in the case of full-time studies and between four and six on a part-time basis. It is mainly destined for teaching in the primary school, but is also suitable for secondary education. During the attendance, training in teaching is envisaged. If students have other undergraduate credits, the curriculum's duration can be shorter.

The Bachelor of Arts (BA) and the Bachelor of Sciences (BSc) with QTS

These courses are similar to the BEd, but studies are more geared towards disciplinary subjects. These curricula also lead to the QTS.

Postgraduate teacher training

The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)

This curriculum aims at developing the teaching skills of students with an undergraduate or equivalent degree and is destined mainly for the secondary school. The duration is one year full-time or two years part-time.

School-centred initial teacher training (SCITT)

The SCITT, offered by consortia of schools and colleges on the basis of their needs, addresses graduate students who wish to complete their education in an educational setting. Teaching is imparted by experienced teachers. It leads to the QTS, and, in some cases, the PGCE. Its duration is one year full-time.

Teach first

Teach first is a programme managed by independent organisations that is explicitly addressed to 'leaders of tomorrow'. It allows those who have 'excellent' degrees to work for two years in high-level schools in London, Manchester and the Midlands to obtain the QTS and to develop management and leadership skills.

Employment-based teacher training

Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP)

GTP is a form of on-the-job training that allows graduates to become teachers whilst working. Its main target is mature people wishing to become teachers and it is very sought-after. During the training, which lasts from three months to one year depending on previous experience, candidates work as non-qualified teachers.

Registered Teacher Programme (RTP)

Those who did not complete their academic studies but hold the equivalent of 240 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) points can complete their studies and qualify as teachers. Here, too, the target is those who, whilst exercising another profession, wish to become a teacher but cannot afford a full-time academic curriculum. To participate, candidates should work as non-qualified teachers in a school during a period varying from one to two years, depending on previous experience.

Assessment-based teacher training

Status of qualified teacher

Whoever holds a degree and has worked as an instructor or a non-qualified teacher for a certain number of years in English schools can apply for the QTS on the basis of their skill's compliance to the envisaged standards. This is done through the submission of a portfolio to the University of Gloucestershire, which is responsible for the proceedings of accreditation, including one on-site audit and lasting up to one year.

Overseas trained teachers

Overseas trained teacher programme

EU teachers are on the same footing as the English ones; teachers coming from non-EU countries can follow a special qualification programme (Sayer, 2006) that envisages individualised procedures, depending on the case. It should be stressed that in England there is a shortage of teachers in some disciplines and the recourse to foreign ones is consistent (Halstead, 2003).

In conclusion, there are various ways of becoming a teacher in England. The accent was progressively put on the conformity to some standards, passing from professionalism centred on the individual to one managed from outside (Furlong, 2005), which, in most cases, entails also a passage from an 'extended' form of professionalism to a 'restricted' one. This can imply some negative consequences at the educative level (Halstead, 2003; Osler & Starkey, 2005). It should also be noted that these changes are taking place in a context of strong need for teachers. In the English teacher education system, the number of students has risen from 25,000 to 40,000 in five years (Furlong, 2005).

Teacher Education in Sweden and Finland

In the Swedish system, teacher education took place at the university level as from 1977; in 2001, it underwent a profound reform, in which a single degree replaced

the previous 11 and the simultaneous model was generalised, whereas before it cohabited with experiences of a consecutive type (Eurydice, 2002). In this new model, all graduate teachers have common key-competences plus a specialisation in the disciplinary area and/or age group of reference. The basic curriculum is composed of 140–180 credits² for compulsory school teachers, whilst it ranges between 180 and 220 for upper secondary school (Kallos, 2003).

Teacher education covers three reciprocally integrated areas, which should replace the traditional repartition between education, didactics, disciplinary competences and practice:

- ‘General education’: comprising pedagogical, relational and interdisciplinary topics, for a total of 60 credits.
- ‘Orientation area’: comprising disciplinary and inter-disciplinary topics of relevance for the age groups and school type chosen by the student, with blocks of 40 credits up to a highest total of 160.
- ‘Specialisation area’: in which the competences and knowledge previously acquired are deepened, for a total of 20 credits.

The objectives are the following (Linde, 2003). To:

- transform good and relevant knowledge in the subject or subject areas so that pupils learn and develop;
- assess and validate pupils’ learning and development and also inform and cooperate with parents or guardians;
- transmit and provide a foundation for the fundamental values of society and democracy;
- become familiar with, analyse and determine their views on general human issues, ecological conditions, and changes in the surrounding world;
- appreciate the importance of gender differences in teaching situations and when presenting their material;
- plan, carry out, evaluate and develop teaching and other pedagogical activities independently and together with others and also participate in their management;
- make use of and systematise their own and others’ experiences, as well as relevant research, as a basis for developing vocational activities;
- use information technology in pedagogical development and appreciate the importance of the role of the mass media in this.

A very important aspect, which is common to various Nordic countries, is the definition of a broad and rigorous *framework* on which the experiences at the local levels are built (Ostinelli, 2007a): and this rule holds also for teacher education, inasmuch as the prescriptions above are, in synthesis, those received by universities for the planning of their teacher education curricula. The State defines the access requirements, designates the universities where the courses are offered, allocates funds – and therefore sets the conditions relative to the number of students – and delegates to the National Agency for Higher Education the task of auditing the quality of the curriculum (Kallos, 2003). On the other hand, the faculties regularly undertake self-evaluation. Despite some differences between the universities, there are, nevertheless, common traits (Linde, 2003):

Learning is considered a communicative act. The dominating form of studies in pre-service teacher education is discussions in seminars. The students are supposed to read texts, to analyse them critically and to debate their arguments and standpoints.

Investigating tasks. Student teachers are assigned investigation tasks and they take part in deciding which ones to take on. The lecturers work as mentors, helping out with methodology for carrying out the tasks.

Writing skills. Most of the assignments given to the students call for reporting in written form. When writing, one has to systematise one's thoughts and make them communicable to others. One has to stand up for what one has written and accept critical scrutiny of one's work. That is why writing is highly stressed as an intellectual training in teacher education.

Assessment by essay writing. The assessment in the discipline of education takes place by essay writing, not by sitting for tests. Reading for memorising is totally out of fashion. What is asked for is to use the literature and one's own reflections for writing essays of given tasks. This work is usually done at home and the students are given a good amount of time for the tasks.

In Finland, whose organisation was not very different from the models of Central Europe during the period that goes from the second half of the 18th century to 1970, a reform merged under the roof of the university the primary school teacher seminars and the courses for lower and higher secondary school as from 1971. A particular novelty for the latter was the duty relief given to pedagogical, didactical and psychological subjects (Niemi, 2000). As from 1984–85, teacher education has led to the obtention of a master as shown in Table II.

TABLE II. The main components of teacher education in Finland

	Major	Minor	Master Thesis	Teaching practice	Other studies
Primary school 160 credits (4–5 years)	Educational studies in the Education faculties 55 credits	Combination of basics of different school subjects and specialisation in one or two of them 35+35 credits	In education 20 credits	As part of the educational studies (20 credits)	Language and communication Optional courses 10–20 credits
Secondary school 160 credits (5 years)	Different school subjects in academic faculties 55–60 credits	One or two other subjects Education in the Education Faculty 30+35 credits	In academic subjects 20 credits	As part of the educational studies (20 credits)	Language and communication Optional courses 10–20 credits

Source: Niemi, 2000

For primary school teachers, the main topic is educational studies (55 credits), comprising three successive levels: *basic*, *intermediate* and *advanced*. During these stages, students develop the practice of teaching, linked to their pedagogical and

didactical knowledge, and become accustomed to using educational research as a tool of inquiry and practical reflection (Kansanen, 2003). As a secondary topic (35 credits), students should develop their teaching skills in some school subjects, such as mother tongue and mathematics, but not only. 35 credits are allocated to the learning of specific ‘themes’ (e.g. education in the early years of life, art, didactics of physical education, etc.). Between 10 and 15 credits are reserved for the learning of the mother tongue and foreign languages, both written and spoken. There are also optional courses, since many students graduate with more than the minimum of 160 credits.

For secondary school teachers, the main subject is disciplinary competence, for which 55–60 credits are envisaged, including 20 credits of teaching practice, plus 30 credits for knowledge of the subject. Usually, during the second university year, students can choose to graduate as teachers, and, from the third year, their curriculum will include an educational course of 35 credits which is subdivided as follows (Table III):

TABLE III. The structure of the academic training of teachers of disciplines at the University of Helsinki

Introductory studies to teaching	2 credits
Philosophical and historical bases of teaching and learning	9 credits
Theoretical and practical bases of subject didactics	15 credits
Research methodology and research on subject didactics	7 credits
Social basis of education	2 credits
TOTAL = A subject teacher’s pedagogical studies	35 credits

Source: Kansanen, 2003

The Master’s thesis topic is pedagogical, didactical or psychological for primary school candidates and disciplinary for those of secondary school; since students of subjects like physics or chemistry will tend, in the writing of their thesis, to use prevalently quantitative methods, it is interesting to note that qualitative methodologies are largely employed in the workshops (Kansanen, 2003).

As in Sweden, the situation in Finland changed from the 1970s and 1980s, when the State exerted a strict curricular regulation. From 1995, the concept of *framework* was applied to the universities, and, hence, to teacher education. Niemi (Niemi, 2000) stresses the positive and negative aspects of these reforms:

The teaching profession is very desirable in Finland and students with good academic results choose it (access, however, is not very easy since only 10–15% are accepted). The professionalism of the Finnish teachers is in general ‘extended’, even though it is slightly more conservative than that of their Swedish colleagues (Simola, 2005)

The Finnish teachers are very motivated. This is confirmed by the low level of abandonment (only 10–15% of teachers thought of changing careers). The young teachers consider the profession from the standpoint of *lifelong learning*, showing a positive and realistic orientation towards the future.

In Finland, educational research has played an important role in teacher education since the 1980s. Today, this finds its full expression in the use of

scientific methodologies of research by students while writing their Master's thesis. This leads teachers to act and think like researchers while teaching. But these aspects are still not adequate:

The various actors taking part in the teacher education process – e.g. the academic faculties, the departments of education, the schools, the local communities and the teachers' training colleges – do not cooperate at their best among themselves.

The skills of Finnish teachers in facing students from diverse cultural backgrounds need to be improved. This implies acquiring new educational competences.

The phenomenon of burnout has manifested itself in teachers nearing retirement or with many years of service and needs adequate responses, also because it implies a lack of teaching personnel, following anticipated retirements.

Conclusion

The comparison between various initial teacher education curricula highlights the persistency of differences between the European countries, even though great steps forward have been made towards a greater homogeneity. Today's teacher professionalism stands half-way between that of a professional and a functionary (Ostinelli, 2007). From what has emerged from the brief analysis in these pages, two trends concerning teacher education appear to prevail: on the one hand, we have the English model, which puts emphasis on the 'executive' character of the teaching profession, envisaging a training, binding objectives and measurable standards, aiming more at conformity than at the professional development of the teachers. On the other, there is the Nordic vision, which lays down exactly the opposite objective, i.e. that of developing extensively the professionalism of the teacher within a rigorous but flexible framework.

From the broader perspective of the whole school system's organisation, the English approach can be a possible answer to situations in which the system is unable to face the circumstances effectively. In England, the strong level of freedom and discretion enjoyed by the teachers was not balanced, at least in the government's view, by a corresponding degree of professionalism and effectiveness. The results obtained, if we consider things solely from the point of view of England's PISA results, are significant: but it is also clear that the chosen way has implied some collateral effects. In particular, the school's educational role was consistently sacrificed in search of effectiveness and efficiency.

The Nordic way is certainly far from easy, in the light also of the oppositions encountered, in particular from the teachers themselves (Webb *et al.*, 2004): it should be stressed that even the better idea, if proposed in a top-down fashion, risks leading to failure. But when compared to the English one, this model appears to be more sustainable, not only for countries like Germany, but also for Italy, whose contemporary school's situation presents some common traits with that of England in the 1990s; last but not least, it should be remembered that Finnish PISA results are better than the corresponding English ones. This shows indirectly that performance does not necessarily require sacrificing teacher's professionalism and scaling down the educational role of schools. Some hints can be obtained from the practice of teacher education in Sweden and Finland.

First, future teachers need to be familiar with the educational research's results and methodologies from their early curricular years. Such knowledge should be linked organically with the practical activities of teaching and a constant interrelation between theory and practice should be envisaged. The objective should be the development of a mental framework where individual attitudes are founded on 'strong' elements and not only on aprioristic and exclusively intuitive beliefs. Moreover, it is necessary to reject the false theory-practice opposition and avoid restricting the need for a more practice-oriented teacher education to the idea of training, as in England (Moon, 2003). The underlying concept should be that of experience in a constructive perspective (Ostinelli, 2007).

The whole teacher education system should be continuous and homogeneous, avoiding incongruence and contradictions among its grades, while respecting their diversity. This should hold for both pre-service and in-service education. The basic idea should be that of lifelong learning, and young teachers should develop a positive attitude towards the change.

The education of every teacher should be based on simultaneous types of curricula: it is a nonsense to envisage, as often happens, simultaneous training for primary school teachers and consecutive training for secondary level teachers. The simultaneous model has undisputable advantages and is a fundamental base for a true professionalism of the teacher, guaranteeing that students will form themselves from the early years as *teachers*, facing soon the concrete teaching of the chosen subject. In other words, the choice of the teaching profession should be done on the basis of authentic motivations and not as a second (or third) choice, as it frequently happens with teachers of scientific subjects³. However, those who choose to be teachers can always obtain a full 'disciplinary' title by attending the necessary additional modules. For example, someone who has graduated as a mathematics teacher could later graduate as a mathematician as well.

It needs to be stressed that, even if teacher education is a key factor in today's school reform, it cannot be held as sufficient for the contemporary school to be able to tackle adequately the challenges posed by our era, given that whatever change, to be effective, should be truly systemic. For example, even very competent and capable new teachers can adapt progressively to the underlying fatalistic culture of a school where they work. Hence, the reform of teacher education should take place in a more extended framework, including a deep change in the way individual schools work, in particular from the standpoint of their autonomy and the quality of their educational offer (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Particular attention should be given to effective strategies aiming at the introduction of the young teachers in the schools in order to take advantage of the positive influence they can have, even on senior colleagues with fatalistic or ultra-conservative positions.

One thing should be clear: top-down interventions are doomed to failure. And this holds even in leading countries such as Finland, where more autonomy in the planning of curriculum, the attempt to generalise forms of teaching oriented to active learning and the efforts geared towards more teacher reciprocal collaboration, have not always been favoured by the latter, in particular in the more 'traditional' schools (Niemi, 2002; Webb *et al.*, 2004).

In fact, the change of the culture of every single school requires time and a considerable amount of work 'on the field' (Ostinelli, 2007). The educational reform should be planned (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996), taking into account the

interaction between top-down and bottom-up dynamics. From this perspective, beyond some ‘illuminated’ policies, the presence in the school of a capable and professionally ‘extended’ principal is fundamental, and the action of a *School Improvement Advisor/researcher* (SIA), whose professionalism should also be of high level (Ostinelli, 2007a), is of great utility. Among other things, if the SIA built good professional and personal relationships with the teachers of the school, he can help them in programming their own professional in-service learning, combining required themes with more individual choices.

In any case, the theme of an education at pace with the times, extended throughout the whole professional life, does not concern only teachers, but also other actors, such as principals, educational consultants, students, parents, etc: if it should be held that the schools should become authentic learning communities (Sergiovanni, 1999), then it is necessary that all those inside the community take part effectively in such a process of change and that they know how to play their role. In this framework, an effective reform of teacher education in all European countries, founded on common basic principles, is, today, more than ever, an issue of great topicality.

NOTES

1. The term ‘extended professionalism’ is used here and in the next pages with the meaning attributed to it by Hoyle, i.e. deep knowledge, advanced skills and high levels of reflectivity by the teacher (Hoyle, 1974).
2. One credit in the Swedish system corresponds to 1.5 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System).
3. From a motivational standpoint, following Herzberg (Ostinelli, 2005), the teaching profession should also guarantee a satisfying socioeconomic status in order to avoid the de-motivation of the subject.

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